

Proper 14, Year B
August 11, 2024

Back in the late 70s, early 80s, the Episcopal Church became enamored of a weekend event for laity which came out of the Roman Catholic Church known as Cursillo. It was an approximately 48-hour retreat which centered around scripture, corporate worship, personal prayer, meditation and testimony. The purpose was to remind us of our baptismal vows, motivate us, revitalize and refresh our focus on community – in fact, as I search for the best description of this experience, I’m thinking of the words we heard this morning from Ephesians:

Putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

In short, we spent 48 hours in community, building one another up, speaking the truth, living in love.

One of the catch phrases we carried home with us from our Cursillo weekend was “mountain-top experience:” we were cautioned that this weekend – if it functioned as was hoped – would be a “mountain-top experience” and that coming down from the mountain on Monday morning would probably be challenging.

Fast forward to August 11, 2024, where we have yet another Sunday with our Gospel speaking about Jesus as the Bread of Life; the St James Press which publishes music for choirs appropriate for the seasons labelled these several weeks as “carbohydrate Sundays,” so using carb language to describe my “mountain-top experience” I’ll call it my Bread of Life experience, subtitled “marked with a seal for the Day of Redemption.” It began last Sunday around noon when I returned from St Thomas and Grace in Brandon to Robert’s revealing a “flurry of texts.” Our older son,

James, and his wife, 5-year-old son and 6-month-old daughter were at the family camp in Rangeley with James' boyhood friend, Patrick, and his 4 children. The flurry-of-texts was the birthing of a plan which would bring Grandma – aka “Mamie” – to baptize Phoebe, the newest life, into the household of God *via* Lake Mooselookmeguntic.

There we all were: five adults, six children on the shores of the waters of life, surrounded by trees of life, a pileated woodpecker couple flying above our heads into the woods, thrushes making their songs, minnows in the lake, clouds moving between patches of blue promise. L'Chaim! To Life! We armed ourselves with water shoes to protect against the gravel and golf-ball sized rocks which cover the “beach,” because when it came time, we were all going into the lake, at least up to our ankles. Five of the six new-lifers would just as soon have been in the lake up to their necks for the duration, but proper Episcopal ritual forced them to answer a few questions related to their faith before the comforting arms of the lake received them. “We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water: the Holy Spirit moved over it at creation, through it you led the children of Israel out of bondage into new life, and your Son Jesus was baptized and anointed to lead us from his death and resurrection to new life. Little old Mamie Ludwig - by her ordination to the sacred order of priests - was able to bow the knee before the lake she had her whole life held as sacred, touch the water and call upon the Holy Spirit to sanctify it. This is life with no more hunger or thirst. This is the Bread of Life. The ten of us – by the power of water and the Holy Spirit – helped to raise precious Phoebe to a new life and introduce her to Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life.

The wonder of a Bread of Life experience is that it is not far away, up on the crest of a hill or the peak of a mountain, so there is no “coming down.” Food made from grain of one type or another is basic to most all cultures of the world. When we receive bread at the Eucharist, we are sharing bread at table, one of the most common activities in community life. By the power of the Holy Spirit, it is the ordinary become the extraordinary: bread becomes the body of Christ, the Bread of Heaven, Life for the World. Jesus Christ came to offer us Bread of Life experiences every day: the ordinary, everyday things become the extraordinary and miraculous if

we just pay attention; these are the treasures of heaven we need to lay up for ourselves: fill our hearts, our back-packs, our reusable grocery bags with those experiences so that no matter what earthly chaos we are in the midst of, no matter what ugliness we face, we carry with us the Body of Christ, the Bread of Life.